



Family relives history in their 18th-century Burrillville home

The Straubes, of Pascoag, are recipients of the Stewardship Award from the state Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission.

01:00 AM EDT on Thursday, June 22, 2006

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BURRILLVILLE -- The home of Linda and Dale Straube has a "lived in" look -- and they've made it their responsibility to keep it that way.

Over the past 20 years, the family has spent thousands of dollars to restore their 18th-century Pascoag home to the way it might have looked when the original owners inhabited it hundreds of years ago. Now, it seems either a modern family or early settler would feel comfortable at the little red house on East Wallum Lake Road.

"We're caretakers," said Linda Straube, 48. "People lived here before us, but no one cared enough to restore it back the way it was."

Care lies in the details.

Sepia-toned photos of relatives mingle on a dresser with old books and antique spectacles. In the main keeping room, modern conveniences like a television and DVD player are tucked away in a wooden cabinet while cast-iron candle makers and earthenware bowls are displayed. An old window pane serves as a mirror above the bathroom sink and magazines find their home in a wooden bucket.

As lovers of history, the family felt it was their responsibility to restore the house to its original luster.

"When you buy a historical house, you buy it because you want to save it," Straube said. "It's a piece of history you're responsible for. It's something special."

Recently, the Straubes were chosen to receive a Stewardship Award from the state Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission. The award, which recognizes the restoration work done to historic homes, began 10 years ago, but have has been awarded sporadically since then, said Ted Sanderson, executive director of the commission.

"The owners have more to say in whether a building is saved than anyone else," Sanderson said. "One person who doesn't care can destroy all the features that give a house historic character."

The family took great pains to research the era and replicate the colors, styles and workmanship of the time.

"Watch your head," Straube warns as she ascends the steep staircase. The original wood lays underfoot, one side worn down from centuries of use.

Wood panels taken from another antique home of the era line the floors of the keeping room. The ceiling boards boast a mortise and tenon joint construction common during the 18th century. The kitchen is trimmed in a muted red, while a simple, pale blue sofa sits beneath a keeping room window.

"Most people don't want to live like this," Straube said. "They want fluffy carpet and a Jacuzzi in the bathroom."

Instead, the Straube's have a claw-foot tub in their bathroom, and bundles of dried corn hanging from the kitchen ceiling.

Historic homes, such as the Straubes', sit in abundance across the state, Sanderson said.

"These early houses are not only important artifacts in their own right, but they are also markers, landmarks where early settlements were," he said.

The home was given to Moses Taft in 1786 by his grandfather, Moses Cooper, according to research compiled by Straube. At the time, Taft was married to the former Bethiah Bartlett and had a 2-year-old son. Taft was also a member of the Gloucester Grenadiers, a local military regiment.

The family purchased the house in 1986 for \$93,000 and began restoring it, Straube said.

"Every president -- this house was here before they were," Straube said. "Every event in our country's history since the Revolutionary War -- this house has seen it."

But getting to this point in the restoration process wasn't easy. Straube estimated that the family spent \$50,000 just on construction alone, another \$1,200 on antiques and \$7,000 on a new roof.

Much of the restoration work was done by Dale Straube, 49, after some of the contractors the family hired proved unreliable or uninterested in preserving the house's natural character, Linda Straube said.

Now, the antique home, more than 200 years behind the times, is the only one their son, Stephen Straube, 19, has ever known.

"It was always normal to me," said Stephen, a sophomore at Franklin Pierce College in New Hampshire. "When I would have friends over, they'd say 'wow, this house is so amazing.' It was so different to everyone else, but it's the house I grew up in."

In 1988, the house was placed on record with the Burrillville Historic Districts Commission. The family is seeking to have it added to the National Register of Historic Places.

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